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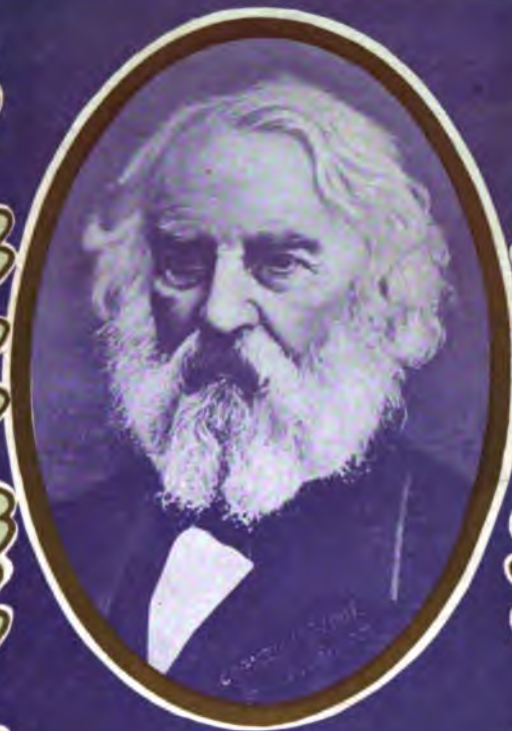
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*The Story
of
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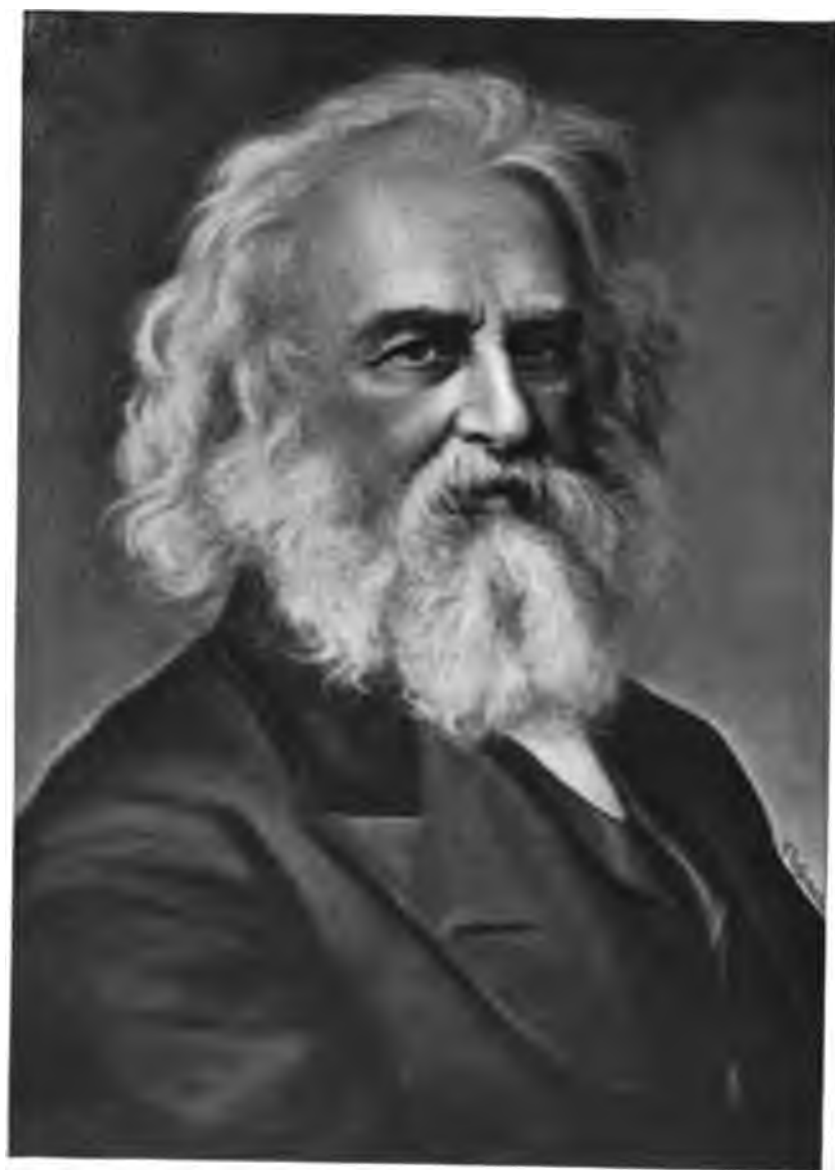
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Longfellow



THE STORY *of* LONGFELLOW

BY

FRANCES FAIRFIELD



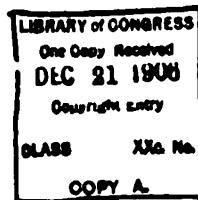
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Longfellow
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Received

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PROLOGUE

“Often I think of the beautiful town
That is seated by the sea”

EACH summer sees an increasing throng flocking to the wind-swept islands of its harbor. Beneath the arching elms of its quiet streets electric cars busily buzz their way to neighboring beaches where homelike cottages welcome the returning wayfarer. New business blocks, luxurious hotels and expanding suburbs proclaim a substantial prosperity. Yet not by these tokens alone shall you judge the City's heart. She exults no less in her famous sons whose work in the world has added to her fame. And dearer than all others is one whom she has delighted to honor—the poet Longfellow. She has placed his monument in the square bearing his name, where none who enter her portals can miss it.

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Seated on a granite pedestal the calm, benignant figure of the poet looks down upon the busy traffic of Congress street and the embowered homes of old State — upon this work-a-day world and that of a dignified past. A touch of his serene spirit, a breath of his peace come to all who, hurrying through the square, but lift their eyes.

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EARLY HOME

IN that historic town of Portland, Maine, there still stands on the corner of Fore and Hancock streets, the house where in 1807 Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was born. This square, three-storied building was once separated from the bay only by its door-yard, the street and a narrow beach. But the tide of fashion left it stranded among tenement houses and high roofs have long since hidden its view of the sea.



“The house where in 1807 Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was born”

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While the little Henry was still a mere baby his parents moved to Mrs. Longfellow's former home on Congress street. This, the family place of the Wadsworths, was the first brick house built in Portland. It stood on the outskirts of the town, in the midst of green fields and waving trees. From the upper windows one looked down the bay with its fleet of wooded islands, or westward to the far blue summits of the White Mountains. Here Longfellow spent his boyhood and here he often came for rest throughout his long life.



"This, the family place of the Wadsworths"

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By great good fortune the mansion with all its contents has been kept for us to see. It has recently passed into the hands of the Maine Historical Society and at stated times is opened to the public. A visit to this old house is the experience of a life time. Stepping over its threshold one leaves the hurrying world without for the leisurely life of a bygone time. All around speaks so eloquently of the past that it alone is real. Up and down these stairs went generations of Wadsworths and Longfellows. In the parlor at the left, they held their stately festivities. Here they were married, and here when life was done, they lay at rest. All is as they left it. But the hearth is cold, for the home life is gone.

Back of the parlor is a small room once General Wadsworth's chamber, and later the dining room. Here stands the desk on which "The Rainy Day" was written. Across the wide hall is the kitchen with all the old time appliances. Today we scarcely know their names. The tin kitchen, apple roaster, Dutch oven and candle moulds have become objects of curiosity. The bread tray used when Lafayette visited the city still decorates the dresser, and numerous shining britannia covers tell us that the Longfellows tolerated no lukewarm food. In front is the family sitting room. Here near the fireplace stands the table round which the children gathered for the school tasks. By Longfellow's favorite window is his own chair. Close by, the grandmother's quaint mirror, with picture and gilt balls, hangs over his mother's sewing table.

Silently we go up the stairs. The pictured face of the young poet looks down upon us as we enter the room where his mother died. Like all the other chambers this one is full of family relics, hoarded with loving care by his sister, Mrs. Pierce. For eighty-seven years she lived in this house and in her will gave it to the Maine Historical Society as a memorial of her famous brother. We look with interest at the four-posted bed with its dimity hangings, at Longfellow's autograph verses, the cocked-hat and canteen of the brave

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Revolutionary soldier, General Wadsworth, and last of all the faded flag that waved over the *Enterprise* in her memorable fight with the *Boxer*.

Climbing the steep and narrow stairs to the third floor, we see the boys' room with its battered desk and trundle bed, the capacious linen closet, and the room which was the poet's during his young manhood. From his windows was visible the rocky Cape, and it was this view which inspired the poem on "The Lighthouse." So interesting are the many family treasures that we linger till the hour for closing and then go out as in a dream to take our places in the busy throng.



"The rocky ledge runs far into the sea
And on its outer point, some miles away,
The Lighthouse lets its massive masonry,
A pillar of fire by night, of cloud by day."

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FROM BOY TO MAN

LONGFELLOW is remembered as a lively boy — sensitive, eager, affectionate and studious. He was the life of the house, but with all his fun he was not noisy. At the age of six his schoolmaster sent him home at the close of the term with a “billet” for his parents, as was the custom. Listen to the stiff words of praise :

“Master Henry Longfellow is one of the best boys we have in school. He reads and spells very well. He can also add and multiply numbers. His conduct last quarter was very correct and amiable.

June 30, 1813.

N. H. CARTER.”

The next spring he was half through the Latin grammar, though accused in his report of “occasional levity.” When somewhat older he became a great reader. He has told us that the first book which really made an impression on his intellectual life was “The Sketch Book” of Washington Irving. I like to think of him as reading Rip Van Winkle by the fireplace on winter nights, while the children listened for the blast of a horn which told that the stage coach had arrived with the evening mail. At thirteen his first poem was published. It was not the silly verses about Mr. Finney’s turnip which people accused him of writing, but “The Battle of Lovell’s Pond.” It was an eventful moment for the boy poet when those lines appeared in the “Portland Gazette,” and with modest pride he saw himself an author. We cannot tell what vague dreams of the years to come may have haunted his boyish heart through that happy day, but with its close came the meeting with his first critic. He heard his father’s friend, Judge Mellen, ask a caller if he had “seen the piece in today’s paper,” and anxiously he listened for a word of praise. “Stiff, remarkably stiff,” went on the unconscious censor, “moreover, it is all

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borrowed, every word of it." What a blow that comment must have been to the sensitive lad, and what an immeasurable loss to the world if those careless words had forever discouraged his attempts at verse!

At fourteen he entered Bowdoin College. Even then we may see a hint of the future for he was noted, said a classmate, for the excellency of his compositions. Friendly with all, intimate with few, he studied and read four happy years. Though so young, he graduated fourth in his class, and gave at Commencement an oration on "Our Native Writers." By the way, Commencement was really true to its name then, for the graduating exercises came in the fall at the opening of the college year. As a senior, Longfellow had found out what he wanted to do, for he wrote his father that he seriously objected to studying law. He begged for a year at Harvard, hoping afterward to find a place on the staff of some magazine. "The fact is," he wrote, "I most eagerly aspire after future eminence in literature, my whole soul burns most ardently for it and every earthly thought is centered in it." Something — even better than Cambridge offered, for Bowdoin called her gifted son to be her Professor of Modern Languages. He was to fit himself by three years of study abroad, a great undertaking in those days.

He left Boston at two o'clock one May morning on the Northampton stage, going to Albany and down the Hudson to New York. From Havre de Grace he later wrote of his safe arrival, after a fine voyage of only thirty days. With the fresh enthusiasm of youth, he found everything enjoyable, writing his mother that even the French dust was more palatable than that at home. How hard he must have studied! In those three years he mastered French, German, Spanish and Italian. With pleasure too, for he wrote his father: "If you are not already studying French or Spanish you should begin at once. By every language you learn a new world is opened before you. It is like being born again." Yet he was no mere bookworm. The letters home show that no bit of romance or beauty passed unseen, and it was not study alone that made his career as a teacher so successful.

THE TEACHER

THE young and struggling college at Brunswick found Longfellow an ideal teacher. He was fresh from foreign travel and as young as many of his pupils. He firmly believed that no profession could be nobler than the teacher's, and that he must interest before he could instruct. No amount of work daunted him. Unable to find text books suitable for his purpose, he at once prepared some attractive little volumes. To do this and to introduce courses of lectures which cost him much time and thought seemed natural and obvious. It was his whole-souled way of working. At six in the morning, the college day opened for him and the sleepy sophomores with a French recitation. From that hour till late at night he was busy, though never too busy to encourage and even inspire the boys who came to him for aid. It was at this time, at the age of twenty-four, that he married Miss Mary Potter, of Portland, whose unusual culture made her his intellectual comrade. Always his face was radiant with the domestic happiness which his young wife brought him. After a few years of faithful service at Bowdoin, he was called to teach at Harvard. Another trip abroad was now in order, for the young professor considered his German far from perfect. To learn a new language was such a real joy to him that he and Mrs. Longfellow spent the summer months in Sweden that he might study Swedish, Danish and Finnish.

This trip, begun with such bright prospects, ended in deepest sorrow. Mrs. Longfellow's death at Rotterdam was a crushing blow. Only by great effort could he continue the studies which had been his pleasure, and were now his only solace. What it meant to him we may judge from his reference to her in the poem — "Footsteps of Angels."

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"And with them the Being Beateous,
Who unto my youth was given,
More than all things else to love me,
And is now a saint in heaven."

College duties at Cambridge brought the stimulus needed to make life tolerable. The Cambridge of those days was a pleasant village, not a city. From its center at Harvard Square an omnibus called "The Hourly" ran to Boston. As the fare was a quarter, it was not so popular as the electric car of our day, and the Harvard students generally went to town on foot. More congenial society Longfellow could not have found. The staid dwellers of the quiet community at first looked with surprise upon his gay Parisian ties and waistcoats, but once they came to know the man, his sunny ways and scholarly tastes made him a great favorite. He soon established himself in the comfortable old Craigie house, not dreaming that it was to be his home for life. The room which had been Washington's became his study. Here, after his school work was done, he wrote "Flowers" and "The Psalm of Life." In this chamber for several years he entertained his friends, Sumner, Hillard, Felton, Hawthorne and occasionally such a visitor as Charles Dickens. All were hardworking young fellows, unconscious of the fame awaiting them.

As professor, Longfellow's work consisted largely of lectures, though he had charge of all the classes in modern languages. Overseeing others was not an agreeable duty, for he wrote his father: "And then this four-in-hand of outlandish animals (the foreign instructors) all pulling the wrong way except one,—this gives me more trouble than anything else. I have more anxiety about their doing well than about my own. I think I should be more satisfied if I did all the work myself." As a matter of fact, frequent changes of instructors made it necessary for him to do more teaching than he liked, for as years went by he became more absorbed in his private studies.

"Coplas de Manrique," a translation, and "Outre Mer," a book of travel, were the first fruits of his youth and inexperience. In the guise of a romance,

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“ His was the troubled life,
The conflict and the pain,
The grief, the bitterness of strife,
The honor without stain.

Like Winkelried, he took
Into his manly breast
The sheaf of hostile spears, and broke
A path for the oppressed.”

Prescott, the great historian, was another friend of Longfellow's at this time. He, we are told, was handsome, companionable and modest—“surprised to find himself famous.” Hawthorne, who was a classmate at Bowdoin, often came from his dreary duties at the old Salem Custom House to the congenial gatherings in that Cambridge study.



“ That Cambridge study ”

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He was dreamy, unsocial and lacking in self confidence, but ever loving and loved. George S. Hillard, who was Sumner's law partner, and Henry Cleveland, writer and scholar, were of the little circle. Together they discussed their work and the success of one gave joy to all.

The advent of the new Mrs. Longfellow made no change in their relations. She wrote: "Felton and the rest of the club flourish in immortal youth and are often with us to dine or sup. I have never seen such a beautiful friendship between men of such distinct personalities. They criticise and praise each other's performances with a frankness not to be surpassed, and seem to have attained that happy height of faith where no misunderstanding, no reserve, no jealousy exists." It was on Longfellow's marriage to Frances Appleton in 1843 that Mr. Appleton gave to the young people the Craigie house, with land reaching to the river—a home of five acres with a beautiful view of the winding Charles and the hills of Brighton. Hereafter a cloudless home life fitted the professor for his work, and in well-earned hours of leisure, he became the poet.

Soon after the first book of poems was printed, Longfellow began to write ballads. The news of an awful shipwreck inspired him one night to tell the story of "The Wreck of the Hesperus"

"On the reef of Norman's Woe."

This poem, he said, scarcely cost him an effort. It came into his mind by stanzas. On its publication in a New York paper he received twenty-five dollars. Though an absurdly small sum for a poem which has become a classic, this was a good price for those days. Not long after he wrote "The Building of the Ship" with its noble climax which Lincoln found so moving.

Of course you have read or studied "Evangeline" with its whispers of the "forest primeval." I wonder if you know that the incident on which the poem is founded was given to Hawthorne as a plot for a story? He was

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“The reef of Norman’s Woe”

not inclined to use it and passed it on to his friend Longfellow. The meter was new in English verse. “It will never do,” said the critics, “nobody can write English hexameters that will be readable.”

The instant success of “Evangeline” was sufficient answer. The sad, sweet story with its lesson of love and patience touched every heart. Its graceful, musical lines were quoted everywhere and translated into many languages. Perhaps no American poem ever won so much love for its author as this.

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"Fair was she to behold, that maiden of seventeen summers"

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The years at Cambridge flowed tranquilly on. We read in the poet's "Journal" of the hours given to recitations, and of his anxiety lest he may fail to give his best to the young minds about him. He speaks of examination days as days of anguish to him, and of his delight when the boys did well.

There are suggestive glimpses, too, of his domestic life. He went coasting with his sons in winter and in summer taught them to swim at Nahant. To his three little girls —

"Grave Alice and laughing Allegra,
And Edith with golden hair" —

he was the most loving of fathers — a playfellow and comrade. Again and again, he tells of quiet evenings in the study when his wife read some new book aloud, or when he read for her kindly criticism some poem he had just finished. A drive or walk with her was always a pleasure worth recording. His varied knowledge of foreign tongues did not always prove a blessing, for he complains sometimes that needy foreigners of all nationalities come to him for help in every kind of difficulty; but never do we read that he refused his aid, although these interruptions were a serious hindrance to his work.

Dr. Holmes, Emerson, Agassiz the naturalist, Dr. Howe, Fields the friend and publisher — hosts of men we now call famous — met as Longfellow's guests in that historic house at Cambridge. Often we see in the Journal such entries as this; "Ole Bull, Thackeray and Fields came out to supper." Or, "At dinner had Ole Bull, T., Story and Fields. After dinner in the twilight Ole Bull played and chanted Norse melodies, which were very striking." And again; "Mr. and Mrs. Stowe came to dinner. How she is shaking the world with her 'Uncle Tom's Cabin!' At one step she has climbed the top of the staircase up which the rest of us climb on our knees year after year."

It was a pleasant life with only one drawback, the lack of time for writing. It had always been the desire of his heart to do something worth while in literature, — you remember his own words. He knew that nothing of permanent value could be written without time for thought, and finally in 1854 he resigned his professorship. You will like to know that his friend, James Russell Lowell, succeeded to that place.

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MAN OF LETTERS



" Falls of Minnehaha "

ALMOST from boyhood Longfellow had taken a keen interest in what we of today call the Indian question. Sometimes I wonder if in writing "Hiawatha" there was not in his heart a feeling that it might be his duty to interpret to the world the higher nature of the Indians. It was his plan to "weave their beautiful traditions into a whole" His friends, even his wife, feared that the poem would lack human interest, and as it neared completion, the poet himself grew doubtful. You know that an Indian is but a child in many ways, and the simple stories of his faith would be ridiculous in polished verse. Longfellow's perfect taste made him choose a primitive, chanting measure, which was a fit setting for the forest myths. All doubts were set at rest when the poem was printed, for it became popular at once. It is no less so today, when it is studied in school rooms from the home of his youth in Maine to the "Falls of Minnehaha," "In the land of the Dacotahs." Surely that middle aged man had the heart of a boy. He could not else have painted Hiawatha's Sailing and Fishing in words that have delighted boys for fifty years. Do you not, as you see the silvery birches shiver in the breeze, think of Hiawatha's request:

" Give me of your bark, O Birch-Tree!
Of your yellow bark, O Birch-Tree!
Growing by the rushing river,
Tall and stately in the valley!
I a light canoe will build me,
Build a swift Cheemaun for sailing,

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That shall float upon the river,
Like a yellow leaf in Autumn,
Like a yellow water-lily !
Lay aside your cloak, O Birch-Tree!
“ Lay aside your white-skin wrapper,
For the Summer-time is coming, '
And the sun is warm in heaven,
And you need no white-skin wrapper ! ”

In the “Courtship of Miles Standish” we have a third long poem of American life. This time the poet must have had a personal interest in his characters for John Alden and Priscilla were his own ancestors. How well he shows us the beauty and the gleams of fun that brightened the dull, hard-working days for those old colonists—days when John Alden walked the Plymouth woods :

“ Gathering still, as he went, the May-flowers blooming around him,
Fragrant, filling the air with a strange and wonderful sweetness,
Children lost in the woods, and covered with leaves in their slumber.”

And now we come to the time in Longfellow's life of which we hesitate to speak — a time which left his life in shadow. While sealing some packages of her children's hair, Mrs. Longfellow's dress caught fire, and she died from the shock of the burns received. Her death, in such a manner, was a tragedy of which her husband could never speak. As time went on he came to feel a reflected happiness from his children's lives, and he found a measured joy in work. But the chief spring of joy was gone, for he walked alone. After the first few months of suffering were over, he turned to his old task of translating Dante—a task for which long study had fitted him. A little comfort must have come from this, for in the lines prefixed to his translation, he says :

“ So, as I enter here from day to day,
And leave my burden at this minster gate.”

In all the writings of his later years we find few allusions to his personal sorrow, but after his death a touching sonnet called “The Cross of Snow” was found in his portfolio. It is dated eighteen years after his wife died, and shows that she had been constantly in his memory.

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"For John Alden and Priscilla were his own ancestors"

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With the "Tales of a Wayside Inn" every schoolboy is familiar, but schoolroom drudgery can never spoil for us that stirring story of Paul Revere, nor can it dim the stately charm of "Robert of Sicily." Longfellow could tell a story in melodious verse as easily as most authors could tell it in prose. In old legends of American and foreign life he found abundant material for these tales, and he told them always to a friendly public. That the Wayside Inn was a real place, with a somewhat romantic history, was an open secret.



"That the Wayside Inn was a real place, with a somewhat romantic history, was an open secret"

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For the fiftieth anniversary of his college class in 1875, he broke his rule of never reading his poems in public and read at Bowdoin his greeting "Morituri Salutamus." What courage rang in his words to those old men!—

"What then? Shall we sit idly down and say
The night hath come; it is no longer day?
The night hath not yet come; we are not quite
Cut off from labor by the failing light;
Something remains for us to do or dare;
Even the oldest tree some fruit may bear.

• • • • •
For age is opportunity no less
Than youth itself, though in another dress,
And as the evening twilight fades away
The sky is filled with stars, invisible by day."

One more trip abroad broke the monotony of his quiet life. In England he was received with every honor. The Queen invited him to visit her informally. He was entertained by Gladstone, Dickens, Tennyson and the Duke of Argyll. Cambridge and Oxford conferred honorary degrees and a regular ovation met him wherever he went. After eighteen months of travel, during which he revisited many places dear to him in youth, he gladly returned to the welcome rest and seclusion of the Cambridge home.

In such a little book as this we have not space to even name all of Longfellow's most important works. From time to time he issued volumes of song eagerly welcomed by a multitude of readers. For the "Hanging of the Crane" he was astonished to be paid \$3,000. When some years later, the Harpers paid him \$1,000 for "Kéramus," he only hoped that they would be as pleased as he was.

But however briefly we may speak of his poems, we must never fail to mention the sonnets. Some of them are among the finest in our language. The tender lines to "Nature" can be understood by the youngest of us while the oldest finds in them a feeling he has vainly tried to express. Many minor songs have been known and loved by more than one generation — "Excelsior,"

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“The Old Clock on the Stairs,” “The Builders,” “The Day is Done,” “Resignation,” “Maidenhood,” and, perhaps the dearest of all as we grow older, “My Lost Youth.” Longfellow’s love for the home of his childhood has endowed Portland, as the scene of the poem, with a nameless charm for summer pilgrims, who find, in greater numbers each year that “Deering’s Woods are fresh and fair,” and that still

“The native air is pure and sweet,
And the trees that o’ershadow each well-known street,
As they balance up and down,
Are singing the beautiful song,
Are sighing and whispering still :
‘A boy’s will is the wind’s will,
And the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts,’ ”



“The shadows of Deering’s Woods”

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“The ocean old”

He also loved the ocean whose summer breezes sweep with healing our rugged New England coast. By the power love gives he could tell us how

“The ocean old,
Centuries old,
Strong as youth, and as uncontrolled,
Paces restless to and fro,
Up and down the sands of gold.
His beating heart is not at rest ;
And far and wide,
With ceaseless flow,
His beard of snow
Heaves with the heaving of his breast.”

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How the pulsing of the waves throb through these lines as they are slowly read aloud! At the music of the words, marshalled by the Master, one hears in memory the measured pounding of the waves, and feels the majesty of power hurling the ocean in endless assault upon the submissive land.

There is a pretty incident connected with the "Village Blacksmith." When the "spreading chestnut tree" had to be cut down to make way for traffic, Longfellow protested in vain. The Cambridge children had a beautiful arm chair made from its wood, and presented it to the poet on his seventy-second birthday. He was much touched by the gift, for the children were always very near his heart. They were his constant guests. After this, every little visitor who sat in the chair was given a copy of the verses in which he expressed his thanks. He closes thus:

"The heart hath its own memory, like the mind,
And in it are enshrined
The precious keepsakes, into which is wrought
The giver's loving thought.

Only your love and your remembrance could
Give life to this dead wood,
And make these branches, leafless now so long,
Blossom again in song."

In reading his poems let us try to see how he had the true poet's gift, which we may all gain to some degree, of seeing beauty in the most common things of life. For him the tides "Evermore upon God's errands" went. Every spring brought a re-creation of the world beautiful of nature. What melody, too, ripples through his verses! Above all, the rare gift of sympathy was his. It not alone helped to make his poems household words, it made his own home a place to which, in his honored age, famous men of letters and poor laborers alike came, as to a shrine. The Man outweighed the Poet. When, in March 1882, he passed "Into the Silent Land," the country mourned the man and friend no less than the sweet singer of home lyrics.

EPILOGUE

Perhaps no estimate of Longfellow can be truer than that of Emerson's clouded mind. The veil that darkened his senses had already fallen and that intellect, once so mighty, saw but dimly the world around. At Longfellow's funeral he looked twice at the peaceful face of his friend. Turning away, the old philosopher said in a puzzled, child-like way ; " I cannot remember that gentleman's name, but he was a sweet soul."

NATURE—A Sonnet

As a fond mother, when the day is o'er,
Leads by the hand her little child to bed,
Half willing, half reluctant to be led,
And leave his broken playthings on the
floor,
Still gazing at them through the open door,
Nor wholly reassured and comforted
By promises of others in their stead,
Which, though more splendid, may not
please him more;
So Nature deals with us, and takes away
Our playthings one by one, and by the
hand
Leads us to rest so gently, that we go
Scarce knowing if we wish to go or stay,
Being too full of sleep to understand
How far the unknown transcends the what
we know.



“ The day is done, and the darkness
Falls from the wings of Night,
As a feather is wafted downward
From an eagle in his flight”

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